A

SERMON,

Occaſioned by

The DEATH of his late Royal Highneſs

WILLIAM AUGUSTUS

DUKE of CUMBERLAND.

[Price Six-pence.]

BRITISH MUSEUM

Reflections upon the Fall of a Great Prince.

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WILLIAM AUGUSTUS

DUKE of CUMBERLAND;

PREACHED AT

St. THOMAS'S, SOUTHWARK,

AND AT

The Evening Lecture, Hanover-ſtreet, Long-Acre,

November 10, 1765.

By BENJAMIN CORBYN.

THE SECOND EDITION.

LONDON:

Printed by R. HETT; and ſold by N. YOUNG (Succeſſor to Mr. HENDERSON) under the Royal Exchange; J. BUCKLAND, in Pater-noſter Row; J. WALTER, at Charing-Croſs; and J. PEYTON, in the Borough.

2 Sam. iii. 38.

Know ye not that there is a Prince, and a great Man this Day fallen in Iſrael?

THERE is no debt more juſt and equitable, than that of praiſe to the illuſtrious dead. And to give them their due, mankind are generally willing enough to pay this debt, however parſimonious and niggardly they may be in their applauſes of the living. Envy, jealouſy, or malice, often interpoſe to rob the latter of that honour, to which their great actions and generous deportment juſtly entitle them: but theſe are paſſions which ſeldom long ſurvive their objects. Black and gloomy, as

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the caverns of death, is that mind, which can harbour reſentment againſt an enemy, laid low in the ſilent grave, and humbled to a level with the meaneſt of his ſpecies.

That this is the common ſenſe of mankind may be learned from a maxim, which is in every one's mouth; namely, that it becomes us to ſpeak nothing of the dead, but what tends to their praiſe and commendation: a rule this, which may juſtly be eſteemed worthy of general, though not univerſal, obſervation. In ſome inſtances, the neglect or the infringement of it may be well warranted; but far the greater part of thoſe harſh cenſures and ſevere reflections, which are thrown out upon dead as well as living characters, ſerve to no purpoſe in the world, unleſs to diſcover the malice of the ſpeaker, and excite the ſame malicious diſpoſition in the hearer.

But, on the contrary, by rehearſing the juſt praiſes of the great and worthy, how are our hearts warmed with the love of virtue! How ſtrongly are we excited to, and animated in, the purſuit of it!

For theſe reaſons, I apprehend, the ancient Greeks and Romans, whoſe admiration of virtue was not greater than their ſkill and diligence in the cultivation of it, appointed funeral orations to be ſpoken in praiſe of them, whoſe noble qualities and worthy deeds had attracted the favourable notice of their countrymen. Theſe harangues were uſed to be pronounced by the moſt reſpectable citizens; and in them the excellencies of the deceaſed were painted with all the pomp of eloquence; the moſt pathetic addreſſes were made uſe of, to raiſe the veneration of the hearers, and diſpoſe them to imitate their great anceſtors.

And

And as this cuſtom ſeems to be in itſelf well calculated to promote an ambition of excelling, in virtuous attainments; ſo, I think, we may conclude that it actually had its effect; and was one grand cauſe of producing that noble ſpirit, which ſhone ſo conſpicuouſly in thoſe countries where it was in uſe.

Indeed the deſire of a reputation, which ſhall ſurvive our perſons, and repreſent us to poſterity in an amiable and reſpectable light; has a greater influence upon the human mind, than may by ſome be imagined. The good and virtuous feel and glory in the ſentiment: the abandoned profligate alone affects to deſpiſe it.

In ancient Egypt, which is reputed to have been the nurſe of ſcience, and the mother of wiſdom, ſo ſtrong was the perſuaſion of this truth, as to have eſtabliſhed regular

gular tribunals, where the merits of the dead were canvaſſed with as much impartiality, as queſtions that concerned the rights and properties of the living. Witneſſes were heard for and againſt the deceaſed party, according to the tenor of which, ſentence was pronounced by the judges; and this ſentence eſtabliſhed his character among poſterity, as a good or bad man.

The practice of the Chriſtian church was for ſome ages conformable to theſe ancient uſages; as we learn from the writings of the fathers, which have come down to our times; ſome of whoſe fineſt compoſitions were employed in celebrating the praiſes of ſuch perſonages, as had, by the ardor and conſtancy of their faith, the extenſiveneſs of their charity, and the purity of their lives, deſerved well of religion, and of mankind.

In the Romiſh church, this practice is ſtill kept up: but Proteſtants, taking more notice of the inconveniencies that accidentally aroſe from it, than of the good effects which it is naturally calculated to produce, have, I think, too much neglected it. For, ſurely, to argue from the abuſe of a cuſtom in itſelf, laudable, to the total diſuſe and utter abolition of it, is no juſt, but a haſty and unwarrantable concluſion. If ſuperſtition has taken occaſion from the praiſes beſtowed by lofty orators upon good and great men, to exalt thoſe dignified mortals into objects of worſhip next to divine, will it thence follow that no reſpectful mention is to be made of deceaſed virtue, nor ſurvivors by the diſplay of it be excited to imitation. The conſequence is by no means a neceſſary, nor even a fair one.

Is it not poſſible to avail ourſelves of the fame juſtly acquired by the dead, without being

being miſled by too high a veneration for them, to deſpiſe our fellow-creatures, or affront our God? Cannot we pay a decent tribute to the memory of our departed friends, and at the ſame time preſerve all due regard to truth, religion, and virtue? Surely a medium might be found, by which the inconveniencies of the practice I am contending for ſhall be avoided, and its advantages ſecured. And, I am afraid, that public ſpeakers are deterred from the exerciſe of this part of their function, more by the fear of giving offence to their hearers, than the apprehenſion of any other bad conſequence that is likely to enſue from it. Nor can it be ſaid that their fears are groundleſs: ſince it hath too plainly appeared that funeral diſcourſes, when more frequent, were regarded rather as compliments to the friends and family, than as tokens of reſpect to the worthy character of the deceaſed. Survivors have, in too many inſtances, made it evident to the

world, that they are ſollicitous about the reputation of their departed relations, only as it contributes to advance their own. This I apprehend to be the reaſon why ſome very worthy perſons, whoſe lives have afforded ample matter for panegyric, have nevertheleſs been ſuffered to go to the grave without having their virtues publiſhed in that ſolemn and ſtriking manner, which is not leſs uſeful to the living than honourable to the dead.

But whatever weight may juſtly be allowed to this objection in the caſe of private perſons, it certainly holds not good in regard to them who have moved in a public and more enlarged ſphere. For great ſtations and high rank place men, I had almoſt ſaid in another hemiſphere, where they are expoſed to the envy only of the few whoſe quality allows them to hope for the honorary marks and rewards of merit; but are carried beyond the reach of thoſe ordinary

jealouſies,

jealouſies, which diſturb human ſociety and cut off its friendly intercourſe.

Perſons in low or middle life, do not pretend to compare themſelves with thoſe whom providence has raiſed to ſo diſtinguiſhed an eminence; and therefore can ſee their virtues and hear their praiſes with entire ſatisfaction. Accordingly, we find, that truly great and good characters have been as generally loved and reverenced by the lower orders of the ſtate, as they have been envied and perſecuted by their competitors for power and glory.

You will eaſily gueſs, Sirs, by what circumſtance I have been led into this train of thinking. The ſolemn pomp of the laſt night, and the mournful appearance of this day, too plainly point out the cauſe of theſe reflections. He muſt be an utter ſtranger to what paſſes in our land, who knows not

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that a Prince and a great Man has very lately fallen in it. We mourn the death of a perſonage, illuſtrious by his birth and by his exploits, great in public, and amiable in private life. We mourn the death of a prince, a hero, and a patriot.

The elevation of princes above the reſt of mankind, is ſuch as to excite a reverence, ſomething like that we eſteem due to beings of a ſuperior order, and to intereſt us almoſt as deeply in their welfare, as in that of our neareſt relatives and deareſt friends. Thoſe events of their lives, which in ordinary mortals paſs unnoticed, engage our ſtrongeſt attention. We are alarmed at the leaſt danger that threatens them, and heartily rejoice in their ſafety. Can we then, with indifference, behold the fall of theſe awful perſonages? Can we, without trepidation, hear their dying groans, and ſee their expiring agonies? When the grave opens wide its

its ravenous jaws to receive the meaneſt of her ſpecies, a ſecret horror ſeizes the moſt determined ſoul. How great then muſt be the ſhock upon ſeeing a prince of royal blood, flouriſhing in wealth, power, and grandeur, ſnatched from the enjoyment of them, and hurried to this dreary abode! There, Britain hath ſeen her William quietly enhearſed, — a ſight which juſtly calls forth her tendereſt regards! For we there ſaw entombed, not only the beloved ſon of our late beloved monarch, but, the ſaviour of our land, the deliverer of his country!

Many, who now hear me, well remember the time, when this opulent, this flouriſhing nation — this nation, which now ſcarce knows how to fear an enemy, and lately bade a bold defiance to more than half the globe, was ſunk in the loweſt deſpondency and moſt puſillanimous dread; at the approach of a foe, in himſelf mean; incon-

inconſiderable in his riſe; and only rendered formidable, by our delays, fears, and diviſions. Experienced generals and veteran troops were in vain oppoſed to this rebellious herd. This wretched band of robbers and aſſaſſins routed two gallant armies, in the pitched field. Every thing gave way to their ſavage fury,—'till the heroic prince, whoſe death we now lament, was commiſſioned by his royal father, to controul their rage, already too long indulged in the ravage of his kingdoms. Providence, which had hitherto frowned upon our attempts in this laudable cauſe, now ſmiled upon them with full complacency; as if it had reſerved the entire completion of the glorious enterprize for this its highly favoured chief. The terror of his name ſoon ſpread confuſion through the rebel bands, and chilled their inmoſt ſoul. Nor did his actions diſappoint the hopes of his country, or remove the fears of the enemy. He puſhed them

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with a vigour unknown before; drove them to the bleak mountains, which ſent them out upon this deſperate ſcheme, and there ſhewed them what liberty and loyalty can effect, when animated by valour, and led by diſcretion.

From this time, he continued to command our armies with the ſame fidelity, courage, and conduct, though not always with the ſame happy ſucceſs: but if perpetual victory did not crown his arms, they never, in the judgment of reaſonable men, were covered with diſgrace. In ſucceeding wars, he ſhewed the ſame contempt of danger; the ſame zeal, for his king and father's honour, for the glory and welfare of his country, which had made him ſo juſtly dear to both. In proof of this aſſertion, I dare alledge that tranſaction, which once was deemed the blemiſh of his life, a dark ſpot in his ſun of glory: I mean the convention with the French

general, by which he generouſly expoſed himſelf to popular odium and royal diſpleaſure; rather than ſacrifice a brave army, to his own ambition and the miſguided deſires of others.

His conduct upon this occaſion; though I believe it is now by conſiderate perſons univerſally approved, as the beſt his ſituation permitted him to obſerve, did actually ſubject him to thoſe inconveniencies, which occaſioned his retiring from a poſt he could no longer fill to the ſatisfaction of him from whom he received it, and whom, by every tie of duty he was bound to obey, in all things conſiſtent with reaſon and honour. An event this, which, though ſince often regretted by honeſt minds, does in one view appear agreeable: for to it we owe the pleaſure we have received, from contemplating this excellent perſon in the engaging light of a patriot; to this we owe it, that we have

ſeen him, who made ſo conſpicuous a figure in the art of war, ſhining in the more pleaſing arts of peace; laying out parks and gardens, with the ſame ſkill he once diſplayed in drawing up armies; raiſing palaces, with as much judgment as he deſtroyed the towns and citadels of the enemy; exerciſing the ſame humanity to the poor labourer, he once ſhewed to the fainting or wounded ſoldier; and exerting the ſame undiſſembled zeal, and unwearied diligence, to calm the diſſenſions that had ariſen among the jarring friends of his king and country, which were heretofore ſo illuſtriouſly employed in cruſhing their inveterate enemies. Buſied in theſe purſuits, ſo becoming his illuſtrious birth, and the high ſtation he had filled; ſo agreeable to the near relation he bore the throne, and his conſtant attachment to the intereſts of the people: in theſe purſuits, ſo conſentaneous to his former life, ſo entirely conſiſtent with his

whole character, death ſurprized him. Nor could the blow have come more opportunely, for his own glory; though, in reſpect to his country, it may appear premature. But it becomes not us, to cenſure the ways of providence. Reſignation is our duty.—Could the affectionate wiſhes of a whole people have prevailed againſt the ſtern meſſenger of death, long would he have remained free from his arreſt. But, alas! that mercileſs tyrant ſeizes all alike; nor will he know any diſtinction between royal and plebeian blood. With reſiſtleſs force he ſtrikes the monarch on his throne of ſtate; the general, at the head of his victorious troops; the judge, upon the awful bench of juſtice; and the ſenator, in the chamber of deep conſultation. Theſe are all as liable to his ſtroke, as the peaſant in his farm, or the beggar on the dunghill.

But this reflection naturally leads me to conſider, the moral purpoſes to which this ſubject may be applied, and the improvement it will afford. From every ſubject, the contemplative mind can extract ſomething uſeful. And death, though the leaſt pleaſing, is the moſt profitable theme. Many good inferences may be drawn, from what has been advanced in treating upon this theme. The following are ſelected as moſt important,

1ſt. The death of great perſonages ſets the inſtability of all human things, in the moſt ſtriking point of view. Let us look back to that great perſonage, whoſe death hath given occaſion to this addreſs. What now remains of that high eſtate, in which he lived? Where is the croud of attendants that diligently waited his call? Where the ſumptuous equipage? Where the magnificent palace? The wide ſpread lawn? The

chearful

chearful grove? And awful foreſt? Alas, they remain; but have changed their maſter! their former lord, wrapt in the cold ſlumbers of death, takes no more delight in them: he has reſigned his pleaſant ſeat, and ample domain; nor does he now poſſeſs more of earth, than the meaneſt of her ſons has a claim to. He has now no attendants, no companions, but his kindred dead. With them he ſleeps and is quiet, every one in the houſe of his fathers. He has taken poſſeſſion of that manſion, which is appointed to all the living. Nor is he the only royal inhabitant of that gloomy manſion: its damp walls contain the bones of many illuſtrious monarchs. Many who have filled or ſtood near a throne, now lie buried in its capacious womb. This is the melancholy end of human greatneſs, and of human littleneſs — here they both center and are reduced to the ſame level! A conſideration this, than which, nothing can more

more ſtrongly militate againſt pride, vain glory, and ſelf conceit. Nor is it only the vanity of the great which it attacks. Its force is as directly levelled againſt the ſame folly in perſons of lower degree; who, upon the leaſt real or apprehended advantage over their fellow-creatures, are equally ready to indulge it. Think, Sirs, how many are the air-blown bubbles of greatneſs, which in a few years you have ſeen diſperſed. Then, be proud if you can of the paltry diſtinctions, that raiſe you above the crowd. Have you not ſeen riches and honour, wiſdom and valour, greatneſs of ſtation, nobility of birth, princely dignity, and awful majeſty, bow their enſigns to the ſtern conqueror — death? And after ſuch a melancholy ſpectacle of the miſerable wreck of human grandeur and felicity; upon what a groundleſs baſis muſt ye build your flattering expectations! Quick then demoliſh theſe fantaſtic ſtructures of aerial architecture;

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and, upon the ſolid foundation of reaſon and ſcripture, raiſe the plain and modeſt, but firm and laſting towers, of faith, hope, and charity. Like an impregnable fortreſs, they ſhall defend you againſt the ſhock of adverſity; in every diſtreſs, afford you a ſafe retreat: and, when the cold hand of death ſhall blaſt all your ſchemes of terreſtrial happineſs, they will prove the pleaſant ſeats of eternal joy, matchleſs felicity, and bleſt repoſe. Theſe are the objects, which can alone be juſtly ſtiled worth ambition. And here ambition may take its full ſwing.

2dly. From contemplating the death of that princely hero, ſo lately gathered to his illuſtrious fathers, it is very natural to carry our thoughts, to that awful ſcene which will ſucceed death, I mean the judgment: for "as it is appointed to man once to die, ſo after death the judgment*."—A judgment, to

* Hebrews ix. 27.

to which the great and powerful muſt ſubmit, as well as the pooreſt and moſt deſpiſed of mortals. From human judicature, indeed, power and grandeur do ſometimes ſcreen the greateſt offenders; but ſo will it not be at heaven's grand tribunal. Such is the extenſive knowledge and inflexible juſtice, of the Judge, who will there preſide, that nought but ſincerity and humility will conciliate his favour; nought elſe avert the ſad effects of his ſore diſpleaſure againſt the impious hypocrite, and abandoned profligate.

In vain does the labouring mind ſeek for words to expreſs, and that even faintly, the ſolemn proceedings of the great deciding day. The powers of language, and even of imagination, ſuffice not to the arduous attempt. Every attending circumſtance adds grandeur to the ſcene — the dignity of the Judge — the number, the quality of the culprits — and the important conſequences, that will follow the deciſion. We ſhall

there behold God's own exalted Son upon the judgment ſeat. Before him ſhall be aſſembled all nations; the great ones of the earth mixed with the meaneſt; kings and emperors, ſtateſmen and generals, ranked with their ſubjects, their ſoldiers, and their ſlaves; and a horrid ſhock will it give the mind, which is infatuated by falſe notions of greatneſs, honour, and happineſs, to ſee the latter approved, and rewarded, while the former are branded with eternal infamy, and given over to remedileſs deſtruction! And, Sirs, is there not juſt reaſon to apprehend, that this will, in ſome inſtances, be the caſe? but, far be it from us to anticipate the judgment of heaven. Let us rather prepare for it, by a life of faith and obedience; thus endeavouring to ſecure an intereſt in the favour of our Judge; in which becoming attempt, if we have the happineſs to ſucceed, (nor need we doubt ſucceſs, encouraged and aſſiſted as we are by divine energy)

energy) not the higheſt ſtation upon earth, the plenitude of power, riches, and honour, can afford an equal felicity. The man who has a fair proſpect of inheriting this exalted felicity, need not, and, I ſhould think, cannot, envy the lot of fortune's moſt favoured children.

3dly. When we behold the princes and great men of the earth ſinking into its boſom, or ſee them falling from the pinnacle of human grandeur and proſperity, to the loweſt depths of ignominy and diſtreſs, as is not unfrequently the caſe; in the proſpect of ſuch viciſſitudes, can we repine at the leſſer calamities that befal ourſelves? Can we murmur at the various changes our condition undergoes, or mourn the ſwift approach of death, our laſt and greateſt change? How unreaſonable, how childiſh is it, to deſire an exemption from the common lot of humanity, and peeviſhly to de-

cline the burden, which we ſee all before us bearing, and which all behind us muſt take up? Rightly doth Job ſay *, that "man is born to trouble, as the ſparks fly upwards." The experience of numberleſs ages, hath confirmed his judgment of human life. Let us then take the portion aſſigned us, nor by an abſurd oppoſition, exaſperate our calamities.

This is a leſſon, which the mere light of reaſon ſuggeſted to a heathen mind; and how beautifully does the diſcerning ſage inculcate it upon his friend, in a conſolatory epiſtle, occaſioned by the death of a beloved child †. "I lately, ſays he, fell into a reflection, which, as it has afforded great relief to the diſquietude of my own heart,

* Chap. v. verſe 6.

† See Melmouth's Tranſlation of Cicero's Familiar Epiſtles, vol. iii. book 2. letter 3.

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it may poſſibly contribute likewiſe, to aſſuage the anguiſh of yours. In my return out of Aſia, as I was ſailing from Ægina, towards Megara, I amuſed myſelf with contemplating the circumjacent countries; behind me lay Ægina, before me Megara; on my right hand, I ſaw Piræeus, and on my left Corinth. Theſe cities, once ſo flouriſhing and magnificent, now preſented nothing to my view, but a ſad ſpectacle of deſolation. Alas! (ſaid I to myſelf) ſhall ſuch a ſhort-lived creature as man complain, when one of his ſpecies falls either by the hand of violence, or by the common courſe of nature — whilſt in this narrow compaſs ſo many great and glorious cities, formed for a much longer duration, thus lie extended in ruins? Remember then, O my heart, the general lot to which man is born; and let that thought ſuppreſs thy unreaſonable murmurs." How juſt, how wiſe, and truly

noble, is this way of thinking? And what a diſgrace muſt it reflect upon the chriſtian name and character; if we come behind the heathens in the leſſons of true wiſdom, and in properly improving the ravages of time, and the monuments of our mortality! And (to ſhow you that our holy religion affords the means of doing this to much better effect than could the moſt ſtrenuous efforts of unenlightened reaſon) I will ſubjoin a quotation from a chriſtian author, and one of our own country too, on which his writings have conferred diſtinguiſhed honour. I mean the incomparable Addiſon. "When I look upon the tombs of the great (ſays this moſt elegant of writers) every emotion of envy dies within me. When I read the epitaphs of the beautiful, every inordinate deſire goes out. When I meet with the grief of parents upon a tomb-ſtone, my heart melts with compaſſion. When I ſee

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the tombs of the parents themſelves, I conſider the vanity of grieving for thoſe whom we muſt ſo quickly follow. When I ſee kings lying by thoſe who depoſed them; when I conſider rival wits placed ſide by ſide; or the holy men that divided the world with their conteſts and diſputes; I reflect, with ſorrow and aſtoniſhment, on the little competitions, factions, and debates of mankind. When I read the ſeveral dates of the tombs, of ſome that died yeſterday, and ſome ſix hundred years ago; I conſider that great day, when we ſhall all of us be contemporaries, and make our appearance together*." Thus to improve the various occurrences of this fluctuating ſcene, is to be a true philoſopher. Such reflections will lead us to regard death in its proper light; not as the extinction of our being, but only the change of its form — a change which will introduce us

* Spectator, vol. I. N° 26.

us to the enjoyment of a more compleat and durable felicity, than can be attained to, in our preſent ſtate: " For this corruptible muſt put on incorruption; and this mortal muſt put on immortality !"

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THE END.